

WHAT ARE THE POLITICAL PARAMETERS? 9

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Introduction

How is one to make sense of two apparently contradictory currents in South African land reform policy? On the one hand, there has been a discernible shift in policy and political discourse over the past few years away from market-based land reform and towards more state intervention in land markets and some (unclear) notion of 'agrarian reform'. On the other hand, in terms of the practice of land reform by the state, there has been an intensification of some reactionary trends, towards a limited and elite capitalist farmer settlement programme, and the privatisation of delivery.¹

This chapter sets out to provide an analysis of the political space for more radical policy approaches to land and agrarian reform as at early 2008, and to reflect on the implications of the political terrain for strategies of civil society and popular forces, and for those within government and party structures who advocate a more substantial and transformative process. The primary question addressed is: *What is the political room for manoeuvre for a more progressive direction for land and agrarian reform in South Africa?*

In order to explore this question, the chapter reviews the apparently contradictory shifts in political rhetoric, policy and practice that have characterised the past three years since the National Land Summit of 2005. Stepping back from this detail, it explores the interests, alliances and networks of the political forces that are ranged around these issues, both within and outside the state, their location, influence and relations with one another. Finally, it tries to explain how one might understand the significance of the ANC's national conference at Polokwane in 2007, the shifts within the ruling alliance that became visible there and a key resolution emanating from this conference.

It is a conventional wisdom in South Africa that land reform is accorded low political priority. Since the advent of democracy, an urban-based ruling party in alliance with organised labour has perpetuated and even deepened an urban bias in state policy. This was made possible by the weak and fragmented nature of rural social movements, giving the rural poor little political voice. As a result, the demand for rural land and livelihoods – which is evident on the ground – suffers from chronic neglect at a national policy level. Therefore, for at least the first ten years of the post-apartheid period, land reform, while of symbolic importance, carried little political weight.

¹ This chapter draws on the discussion at a round table debate hosted at PLAAS on 19 April 2007, and the contributions of Mazibuko Jara and Brian Raftopoulos, in particular. Any errors or shortcomings are the responsibility of the authors.

Nevertheless, this caricature may now need to be challenged. Significant developments over the past few years suggest that land reform and the rural economy as a whole have acquired new political significance, and that in the coming period there may be new spaces to push for more meaningful land reform and agrarian change. Therefore, understanding this shifting terrain, and the opportunities it may provide, is essential for those mobilising in favour of alternative land and agrarian policies.

In considering this new situation, we break with the dominant analyses among critics of the current land reform, which have tended to be overly technical, focusing on how land reform should be done differently, rather than the wider politics that shape it. As a result of this, the debate on land has been somewhat ghettoised from wider debates about the economy and development. This chapter seeks to relocate land and agrarian issues within the core debates about the South African state and the ruling alliance: their ambiguous relations with capital and with 'the rural poor', the role of the state in the economy, and which developmental path is to be pursued.

Taking stock of 'the agrarian question'

In a context different from South Africa, Samir Amin (2003) has noted that

Modern capitalist agriculture – encompassing both rich, large-scale family farming and agribusiness corporations – is now engaged in a massive attack on third world peasant production. The green light for this was given at the November 2001 session of the WTO in Doha, Qatar. There are many victims of this attack – and most are third world peasants, who still make up half of mankind.

South Africa is no longer a peasant society in Amin's sense, given its long history of minerals- and energy-led industrialisation. Despite this, the powerful combination of modern capitalist agriculture and globalised capitalism constitute a systematic and structural attack on a wide range of extremely vulnerable social strata in South Africa. Relevant for our discussion here are the millions of rural-based subsistence and small-scale producers, rural dwellers, farm workers and farm dwellers – in short, the entire spectrum of the 'rural poor'.

From the perspective of the ANC-led government, the opening up of agriculture to global capitalist market forces made eminent sense

From the perspective of the ANC-led government, the opening up of agriculture to global capitalist market forces made eminent sense. In a modernising paradigm, the role of agriculture was seen as important to an increasingly globalising economy and the re-entry of South Africa after the sanctions era. The state's political strategy since the mid-1990s has pivoted around one underlying assumption: that sustained capitalist growth of around 6% per year is essential. In pursuit of this objective, a powerful political-technical-managerial centre was forged within the state, focused around the Presidency with close ties to key departments, notably the Treasury and the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), and to big business, including agrarian capital. This strategy relied on the assumption of a 'benign globalisation', in which booming trade is expected to spur sustained growth and development, and that what is required for South Africa to benefit from this is a catch-up and alignment strategy, with 'sound economic policies' and 'good governance' at its heart. Consequently, like the rest of the South African economy, the accumulation regime in agriculture has not fundamentally changed since 1994 in its systematic and structural features; rather, they have become sharpened and entrenched.

Elsewhere, one-sided liberalisation and deregulation of global agriculture has already eliminated billions of small (as well as larger) less competitive producers within the space of a few decades

(Amin 2003). In South Africa, after more than a decade of agricultural liberalisation and deregulation, we have seen localised versions of these global trends. Inefficient commercial farmers previously reliant on trade protection and state subsidies have been eliminated, prompting a dramatic process of concentration in ownership and a concomitant rise in farm sizes in the commercial agricultural sector, as growing agribusiness interests have acquired ownership stakes in farm production (see Chapters 5 and 6).

Outside commercial agriculture, the land reform programme has spawned a still small population of beneficiaries (approximately 150 000) who are neither landless nor, in many cases, successful small-scale farmers. These beneficiaries are suspended midair, without the potential to be part of the global expansion of capitalist agriculture; nor do they constitute a successful new smallholder class. Alongside these beneficiaries are millions more of the landless eking out a living from multiple livelihood strategies. These millions have been displaced from independent production or from employment on farms, in the mines and the factories; they are 'surplus people' – a term notoriously coined by apartheid architect, Hendrik Verwoerd. A significant number of them hope to resolve their marginality through migration to urban areas (Du Toit & Neves 2006). However, this rural-to-urban migration locates them in zones of continued economic exclusion, structural unemployment and the apartheid legacy of underdevelopment, thus clothing them in the new mantle of the 'urban poor'.

The above is to underline the essence of South Africa's agrarian question: millions of land-hungry rural dwellers are engaged in multiple, largely survivalist activities in which agricultural production has been a small component, while increasingly concentrated and globalised capitalist agriculture (based on the principle of return to capital) employs only a few hundred thousand farm workers who themselves are no longer peasants.

Containing contradiction: shifts in policy and discourse

Containing contradiction has been a key feature of the politics of land reform in South Africa, and in the response to the agrarian question sketched above. The ANC-in-government has been able to square a number of circles, pursuing land reform while removing agricultural support, and aiming to reduce poverty but favouring the better-off. Most remarkably, the political establishment has been able to tolerate continued poor performance, in both the pace and scale of the programme, and in its outcomes for production and for the livelihoods of those intended to benefit (see Chapter 2). Since the National Land Summit of 2005, new directions in land reform policy have been pursued, but rather than resolving the contradictions, these have been underscored. This section explores the current conjuncture. It is a moment characterised by flux and uncertainty, which, for this very reason, also presents the possibility of change.

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A stronger role for the state in acquisition (but for what and for whom?)

The government's surprise and very public concession at the National Land Summit in 2005 (and repeatedly since then) that the 'willing-buyer, willing-seller' approach to redistribution had failed prompted a flurry of new policy initiatives that produced a bizarre compendium of unrelated

and ad hoc policies, most of which have not progressed beyond discussion papers (see Chapter 3 for a fuller treatment of these). In itself, this signifies a vacuum in political direction that has characterised the past three years. At the same time, the erosion of land reform gains through both the underutilisation of redistributed land and the sheer scale of farm evictions has become more apparent, and has emerged as a political liability for the state.

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Most policy shifts under discussion in this period have focused on interventions in land markets: restrictions on foreign ownership of land, the promotion of an agricultural land tax (over and above property rates), land ceilings and, most recently, a new Expropriation Bill, approved by Cabinet in early 2008 and expected to be passed by Parliament later in the year, but subsequently shelved following pressure from farmers' associations, business bodies and opposition parties. The much-awaited review of the White Paper on South African Land Policy, on the cards since 2006, may yet happen and could open space for policy change but, unless expanded into a joint initiative with agriculture, is likely to focus rather more narrowly on mechanisms for land acquisition. Meanwhile, the Land and Agrarian Reform Project (LARP), adopted as one of 24 Presidential 'apex priorities' in October 2007, has set five targets, one of which is to deliver five million hectares by 2009 to 10 000 new agricultural producers. While LARP claims to prioritise (former) farm workers and dwellers, it appears to be geared towards establishing medium to large farmers with an average of 500 hectares each. The targets mean that LARP is to achieve more in the coming year than has been achieved over the past 12, while distributing more resources to fewer people. In pursuit of this unlikely goal, the government will rely in large part on the private sector and agribusinesses to become accredited service providers to implement land reform on the state's behalf. This will see the state contracting with businesses to package and implement projects from start to finish – including the identification of land, the selection of beneficiaries, planning, acquisition and development of land, and provision of support services, including mentoring and training, farm management, and financial, technical, insurance, legal and marketing services (DLA n.d.). Being paid a proportion of total costs involved, there is an obvious incentive to prioritise large projects to deliver high-value land at scale, and to serve those applicants who already have resources and skills. The move to outsourcing the work of land reform signals a failure (or unwillingness) to conceptualise the contradictory roles of the state and private sector, and the contradictory interests of the rural landless and agribusiness. This seriously calls into question the degree to which a revitalised land reform would confront the vested interests of landowners and agrarian capital – and what type of agrarian change would ensue.

Agrarian reform has climbed the agenda

In the midst of the hiatus following the Land Summit's promise of change, a widespread but superficial convergence of opinion has congealed around a core position: that land reform is in crisis not only because it is too slow, but because of its disappointing outcomes, and that a new point of departure is now required. This is a position shared by civil society organisations, the political establishment (the ANC and its allies, the Presidency, the two key departments) and big business (see, for instance, CDE 2008). Yet there remains little clarity on the shape of a policy alternative. What does seem clear is that land and, increasingly, agrarian reform have climbed the political agenda. This means greater priority in this area in the future, but also the possibility of greater manipulation for political mileage.

The most striking shift over the three years since the Land Summit has been the adoption by the ANC and the government of the notion of the 'agrarian' and its enthusiastic deployment in a variety of contexts, not least the expansion of 'land reform' to 'land and agrarian reform' in the state's lexicon, and the emergence of the 'agrarian revolution' as a term to denote the ANC's vision of major

(usually unspecified) change in the countryside. As the minister noted in her budget speech, 'Without land redistribution, the agrarian revolution is impossible' (Xingwana 2007). Reference to 'agrarian reform' or, more flamboyantly, 'agrarian revolution' has generally been used vaguely to indicate more thoroughgoing changes in production and increased output of both primary produce and processed goods. This has reinforced the argument put forward by the Presidency's economic advisors that the number of livelihoods sustained by agriculture cannot be expanded by maintaining existing production; rather, the economic argument for land reform must lie in restructuring that expands its distributive effects, ideally (though not necessarily) increasing overall output at the same time. As a senior agricultural official has observed, 'we prefer production by the masses rather than mass production'. However, such rhetoric has found little purchase in the actual policies and programmes of a government that has overseen agrarian restructuring in favour of greater concentration of landholdings and of capital in agriculture (see Chapter 5 for more on this trend, and Chapter 6 on the implications for future livelihoods and employment in agriculture).

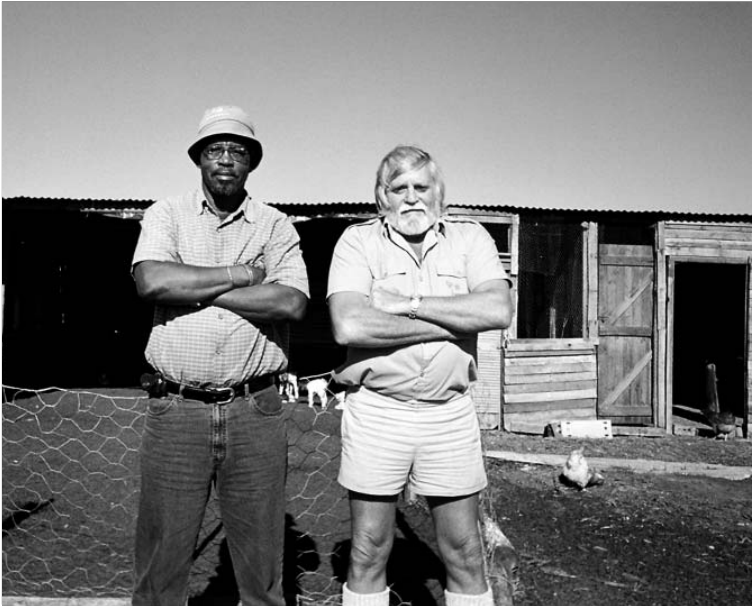
While the 'land NGOs' (the main mouthpiece of civil society in this sector), over the past decade and more, have focused their advocacy on the Department of Land Affairs (DLA) and, to a much lesser degree, the Department of Agriculture (DoA), recent policy shifts suggest that important openings exist elsewhere in government. The Treasury and the Presidency, which have focused their attention on the 'second economy' and mass unemployment, under the rubric of ASGISA (see below), control higher-level policy decisions.

GEAR to ASGISA: agriculture features more strongly

What, then, is the place of agriculture and land reform in the shifting economic policy debate? The Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) strategy that dominated policy from 1996 until about 2004 (and arguably, to a degree, since then) prioritised fiscal restraint and export-led growth in a liberalised economy, effectively favouring agribusiness, while more recent macroeconomic frameworks have set new priorities. Having rejected inward industrialisation in the mid-1990s, preferring rapidly liberalised trade, the ANC has belatedly warmed to the idea of a more direct role for the state in stimulating new patterns of broad-based growth. Although not a reversal of the cautious policy stance of the 1990s – and certainly without much impact on fiscal and monetary policy – the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa (ASGISA), launched in 2006, has focused attention on the role of the state in supporting growth in, and redistribution to, the 'second economy'. In 2007/08, the Presidency reviewed all state programmes in order to evaluate existing support for the 'second economy', and to guide future anti-poverty strategies. It noted the need to scale up programmes to create livelihoods through improved funding and co-ordination of land reform, and expansion of publicly funded programmes into growing the small agro-processing sector, in particular (SESG 2008). One of the political spaces available to advance meaningful land and agrarian reform, then, is within the state's evolving approach to addressing the 'second economy' and, therefore, the need to restructure the 'first economy'. This should not suggest that there are indeed 'two economies' in South Africa; rather, what is still to be articulated is an argument and vision for agrarian reform based on an analysis of how the so-called 'first' and 'second' economies are interrelated, are two sides of the same pattern of accumulation, exclusion and adverse incorporation. This is now attracting newfound political attention.

Alongside ASGISA (and nominally to give effect to it), the National Industrial Policy Framework (NIPF) is another important framework that potentially lays the basis for a new direction in land and agrarian reform. It points to the need to diversify the economy beyond its mineral and agricultural base, and proposes incentives to promote a development path that is both more labour-intensive and more

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Neighbouring farmers meet to discuss fencing maintenance, Humansdorp area, Eastern Cape. June 2004. Photo by Ruth Hall.

Despite these macroeconomic policy shifts, agriculture (and land reform) remains marginal to core government and ANC thinking about the future of the economy, not least because spatial development policy suggests that investment should be focused in urban centres and should extend only to processing or industrial zones in the rural areas. This influential framework directs resources away from rural poverty and is antithetical to the idea of investing in smallholder production in economically depressed regions.

value-adding. Agriculture and agro-processing are among the key labour-intensive sectors of the economy it identifies as where new strategies for enterprise development should be explored – for instance, the potential role of light industry in the rural non-farm economy (DTI n.d.). Even so, it does not set out any vision for the role of land reform in bringing this about, or precisely what change in production is envisaged. Industrial policy, therefore, seems to propose strategic state intervention to promote a new growth path, which might favour agriculture and particularly ‘non-traditional agricultural activities’ and which may include niche products and labour-intensive processing (DTI n.d.); yet it does not challenge the structure of agrarian production or accumulation, and fails to identify this as a pro-poor growth sector.

The crisis of rising food prices

A further factor impinging on the political terrain is the crisis in world food prices. The United Nations’ Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) says that between March 2007 and March 2008 the price of cereals increased by 88%, oils and fats by 106%, and dairy by 48% (Angus 2008). The World Bank says that in the three years to February 2008, wheat prices rose by 181% and overall global food prices increased by 83% (Angus 2008). The price of the most popular grade of Thai rice rose more than fivefold in the past five years, and threefold in the year to April 2008. Increases are even greater in some local markets – in Haiti, the price of rice doubled in one week at the end of March 2008 (Angus 2008). These increases are catastrophic for the 2.6 billion people around the world who live on less than US\$2 a day and who spend 60% to 80% of their incomes on food.

Arising out of the combination of global as well as local factors, South Africa experienced earlier waves of steep food price rises in the 1990s and 2001/02. The latest increases from late 2007 into 2008 prompted senior ANC and government officials to reframe their views on the state’s role in relation to agriculture and its transformation. Rapid food price inflation has hit the poor hard, in a country where the poorest 60% of the population spend over a quarter of their incomes on food, and where the lion’s share of rising prices can be captured by the handful of agribusinesses that dominate in the domestic market. In this context, Finance Minister Trevor Manuel (not known for his interest in small farmers) surprised many by declaring:

For much of the past decade, too little policy attention has been focused on how we could increase agricultural production. This goes for both large-scale commercial farms and for small-scale subsistence farmers...On the production side, the legislative framework is in

place for small-scale farmer cooperatives to club together to procure services jointly, to purchase tractors or fertiliser and to get their products to markets. Government can do more in rural areas to support small-scale farmers...When the price of agricultural commodities increases, we see a distribution of resources away from food consumers towards food producers. In countries where the poor produce food or are direct beneficiaries of food production, this change in food prices has positive effects... In South Africa where the poor are not large producers of food, the big net gainers are not the poor (either in rural or urban areas). (Manuel 2008)

While in the past the government's attention to food prices has been exclusively on stamping out anti-competitive behaviour like price-fixing, Manuel's statements for the first time concede that our inability to produce food affordable to all South Africans is *not* due to the imperfect functioning of markets that are otherwise benign, but lies in the structure of production itself, which requires state intervention. It is striking that, while Manuel and others have argued that the government could do more to promote investment in commercial farming and agribusiness, they look to the smallholder sector for substantial expansion and improved productivity that may increase the country's output of staple grains, particularly maize, and meat (Manuel 2008; Xingwana 2008). In addition to considering direct food subsidies and price controls, then, this suggests the need for a different structure of production. This is significant, although, given his track record, it is wise to be cautious in one's expectations of how far Manuel (or his successors) will go in policy terms to give meaning to the ultimate logic of these statements, namely public investment and incentives to promote the expansion of food production by, and for, the poor.

A developmental state and the second economy

A key concept underpinning the more progressive currents in the thinking of the ANC is that of a 'developmental state', which suggests not just more state, and more state intervention in the economy, but a state that intervenes more strategically to shape market behaviour in favour of new patterns of production and accumulation. In other words, the work of supporting the 'second economy' (as acknowledged in ASGISA) is insufficient; a developmental state will need to combine this with interventions to reshape the 'first economy', and restructure the market relations between the two. Instead of relying on 'trickle-down' effects from the first to the second economy, or on 'ladders-up' for individuals to leap from the second to the first, a developmental state that is unified and administratively strong would need to condition market behaviour through a combination of direct subsidisation, incentives and regulation, diversify the economy and direct resources to new industries and mobilise capital and civil society around this project (Makgetla 2008).

Since 2006, the notion of a developmental state has gained ground in the tripartite alliance, and has prompted debate and contestation over what it means, whether it is the way to go, and what it is that a developmental state is or does that distinguishes it from the current South African state. Reviewing these debates suggests that the political utility of the term lies precisely in its vagueness; while it smacks of progressive politics, almost any policy measure requiring state intervention or resources can be justified in terms of it. What is yet to become evident is what a 'developmental state' would or could or should do about land and agrarian reform. Even so, this new direction in thinking about economic policy and state roles may open opportunities for a different kind of land reform, and a more conducive policy context for new and disadvantaged farmers, as a by-product of this shift. For the first time, the reintroduction of direct production subsidies and a state role in supporting upstream and downstream industries to enable smallholders to access inputs and output markets are on the cards (ANC 2007).

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The spaces opened up by the notion of a developmental state, by the newfound interest in agrarian reform and in broadening production to combat food price rises, could have significant implications. Whether or not some of these policy spaces are used and expanded depends on the balance of social forces, to which we now turn.

The playing field: uneven and contested

Pre-existing socio-economic structures and socio-political institutions influence the struggles for and outcomes of redistributive land reform to the extent in which they shape and condition prior distribution of land-based wealth and political power. (Borras 2004: 287)

The nature of land and agrarian reform will be determined to a large extent by the nature of the power and social relations in the country. The very limited extent to which the historical dispossession of land, rural wealth and livelihoods, and the deliberate underdevelopment of the bantustans, has been reversed is a clear indication that the rural poor and their allies were absent from the 1990s, negotiations process. Yet, in any transformative land reform, the mobilisation of coherent, formidable, conscious and organised social forces with both the weight and voice required to lead the requisite struggles is crucial. This would not be a campaign of one month or even a few years, but a range of protracted struggles over a sustained period of time. What then is the array of those social forces that have interests and aspirations around land and agrarian reform? What are their concerns, capacities and strategies, and what is the balance of forces among them? How and why have these changed over time?

At the risk of being schematic, the important classes and strata that make up the 'rural social forces' are large and small agribusiness interests, individual commercial farmers, a small layer of aspirant black commercial farmers, farm workers and farm dwellers, small-scale black farmers, the mass of rural dwellers, a layer of the rural professional middle class (teachers, civil servants and business people) and traditional leaders. Even though they may have a fundamentally urban orientation, other significant forces in our society relevant to this debate include the urban poor, oscillating rural-urban migrants, the trade union movement, churches and political parties. The ANC's allies in the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and South African Communist Party (SACP) are among the most important organisational forms representing the urban working class. In their various locations, this range of forces and their material interests constitute the contemporary agrarian question. We now examine these in turn.

The position of agrarian capital: powerful yet vulnerable

The renewed political focus on land and agrarian reform strikes at the heart of the interests of agrarian capital. This dominant class force in South Africa's rural areas is made up mostly of white commercial farmers and agribusiness. Agrarian capital has deployed a range of strategies to protect and advance its interests: it was able to secure a weak legislative and policy framework, which it has exploited to block meaningful land reform, and its propaganda machinery emphasises the importance of large-scale agriculture in the economy and in meeting national food security needs – arguments

that hold sway in many government circles – while also announcing its commitment to land reform (CDE 2008; FW De Klerk Foundation 2007). At the same time, agrarian capital undertakes and initiates land reform projects that nurture a thin layer of emerging black commercial farmers and, while actively resisting policy or legislation that veers in a radical direction, readily shifts the blame to a failing state for delays.

Lobbying and advocacy by the most effective arm of organised agriculture, Agri-South Africa (AgriSA), has attempted to redefine land reform in its own interests, as a limited programme of commercial farmer settlement. AgriSA has invested heavily in its close relationship with the highest echelons of government (Cousins 2007; Hall 2004). This interest group is powerful and well organised. The commercial farming sector was regularly consulted by President Mbeki, through his Presidential Working Group on Agriculture, which still meets quarterly and consists of representatives of government and commercial farming interests, both AgriSA and its black counterpart, the National African Farmers' Union (NAFU). Underpinning large-scale agriculture's strategic control of key food production and export earning sub-sectors within the economy, and consolidating their organisational power, is the strength of the commercial farming narrative, the notion that 'only commercial agriculture is *real* agriculture' (Cousins 2007). Conservative policy stances are also influenced by the somewhat stereotyped understandings of agricultural development promoted by both the commercial farming lobby and agricultural economists, and embraced by many ANC policy-makers. This was manifest in the Strategic Plan for Agriculture developed by the presidential working group as its vision for a more competitive and inclusive, but ultimately un-restructured, farming sector.

AgriSA has defended the property rights of landowners, and consistently has stressed the strategic importance of commercial farming for food production and export earnings, while many of its members evict legal occupiers and resist labour laws. It has also managed to build a strategic, albeit strained, alliance with the leading echelons of aspirant black commercial farmers within NAFU (Hall 2004). White farmers are aware that, unlike the mass of the rural landless, these aspirants are unlikely to constitute a large and powerful interest group capable of mounting a serious challenge to the dominant interests within the sector, but rather will be absorbed into it.

The promotion of a layer of black commercial farmers has also been part of a larger post-1994 project of the state working together with big business: the creation of a stratum of emerging black capitalists in all sectors of the economy, including agriculture. In general, the emerging layer of black economic empowerment (BEE) capitalists is not a typical national or 'patriotic' bourgeoisie, for the simple reason that we are dealing in South Africa with a mature (if highly uneven) capitalist formation in which there has long been a significant domestic capitalist class (SACP 2006). In these circumstances, emerging black capital tends *not* to be involved with an expansion of the national forces of production, *nor* in significant job creation. It is, rather, excessively compradorial and parasitic.

The compradorial nature of this emerging class fraction has meant that, typically, it has not accumulated its own capital through the unleashing of productive processes to galvanise a national developmental effort. Although agriculture has not been the most sought-after site of accumulation by this black capitalist fraction, its insertion into mainstream capitalist agriculture has not resulted in a change in the size and scale or social and economic roles of agriculture. Black capitalist farmers have no intention to invest, produce or trade differently from white capitalist farmers. NAFU, in particular, has inserted itself in spaces close to the state at the highest level and relies upon symbiotic relations with the upper echelons of the state apparatus. The way in which many of the small class of new commercial black farmers have accessed land, finance and markets exhibits parasitic features:

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reliance not only on the state and the Land Bank but on the patronage of established agrarian and agribusiness capital, special share deals, affirmative action, BEE quotas, fronting, privatisation, tender policies and trading on its one real piece of 'capital' – access to state power and resources. All this has put pressure on established capital to cut it a slice of the action.

What will break the strategic advantage of agrarian capital, or at least leverage greater concessions from it, beyond its comfortable alliance with black commercial counterparts? Two critical conditions are required for this: a decisive and effective progressive state and a mobilised social force for land and agrarian reform. These are each examined in turn below, starting with the question of a mobilised social force, and the possibility of this emerging in the countryside, among the rural poor, farm workers and farm dwellers, in particular, and the chiefly and professional strata.

Political marginality of the rural poor

The most numerous and significant class stratum in the countryside is that made up of the landless rural masses who face economic exclusion. Rural unemployment figures today stand somewhere between 35% and 40%. The agricultural sector has shed close to 300 000 jobs in the first decade of democracy (see Chapter 6). Studies by May (2006), Aliber (2003) and De Swardt (2003) confirm that 45% to 55% of South Africans live in poverty and of these 70% live in rural areas. It is also reported that 14 million people are vulnerable to food insecurity, while 1.5 million children under the age of six, most of them in rural areas, have been stunted by malnutrition (HSRC 2004).

'pressure from below' has been noticeably absent

It is this sector (poor rural women and men) that could be the main motive force for rural transformation. Yet 'pressure from below' has been noticeably absent. As things stand, there is no consciously mobilised mass force with the economic or political muscle capable of leading on the land and agrarian question. Why has there been so little mobilisation in rural areas?

This lack of participation by the poor in the body politic shows that political democratisation has been dominated by far more powerful and largely urban interests. Part of the explanation lies in the incomplete transition of the poor from being 'subjects' into being 'citizens' of the democratic order, thus remaining passive recipients of development. More fundamentally, poverty and the lack of power of poor households mutually reinforce each other; while poverty may not rob the poor of their agency, it 'circumscribes and limits the forms of agency that are available to them' (Du Toit 2004: 28). Rural women are particularly 'circumscribed'.

Shared concerns about high food prices are potentially unifying

What conditions are required for building the associational capacity or the agency of the poor, given their political marginality? What pathways exist for significant strata of poor people to become engaged agents for social change? Effective social mobilisation around land and agrarian reform will require new alliances between a wide range of strata and formations including political organisations, emerging rural organisations, churches and trade unions – but they are not likely to come together around land reform as a single issue. Remaining within single-issue politics is likely to isolate and 'ghettoise' rural movements from others. A key condition for change in this social force, then, is the broadening of the issues around which people are mobilising. For example, in the former bantustans, the issues are not only about land redistribution but also about rural development, employment and access to basic services. Shared concerns about high food prices are potentially unifying. This requires thinking and practical work around relevant mobilisation and organising strategies that unite all these issues into a common struggle.

Smallholder and subsistence farming, on their own, might be survivalist but, once linked to wider rural development (infrastructure, markets and service delivery), can lay the basis for impoverished

communities to build a wider social struggle for land reform. Two important classes to build alliances with, in the first instance, are farm workers and the rural petit bourgeoisie.

Farm workers and dwellers: integrated yet excluded

The social and economic relations between farmers, as employers and landowners, and those who work the land to stay alive, are a continuation of a long history of dispossession, slavery, access to cheap and sometimes forced labour, exploitative work and social control – processes that have left their mark on farmers as well as workers and dwellers. This long history helped create a landowning class that equated ownership of land with the right to govern the lives of those who work it (Du Toit 2005). Before 1994, well-entrenched social relations of paternalism permeated the living and working conditions on the majority of South African farms (Nasson 1984). These continued, but changed form, in the post-1994 period.

The effects of labour market policy interventions on farm workers have been mixed. Conditions for skilled, core and permanent workers have improved and some progress has been made towards organising them in the big agribusiness and agro-processing sectors, where the Food and Allied Workers' Union (FAWU), a COSATU affiliate, is somewhat present, although this represents a tiny percentage of rural workers, and trade unions are still largely absent from farms. Hardly any visible progress has been made in organising farm workers on individually owned white farms. At the same time, many farmers responded to labour and other forms of regulation by restructuring their businesses through labour shedding (Du Toit 2005). There is ample evidence of a massive shift away from permanent workers towards the use of temporary, seasonal and subcontracted labour (Du Toit & Ally 2004; see also Chapters 5 and 6). In response, in the Western Cape the Sikhula Sonke trade union has grown over four years to reach about 5 000 women farm workers, many of whom are casual or seasonal workers and live off-farm. In addition to these two unions, there are many small and unaffiliated regional farm worker unions whose strategy and impact are not immediately discernible. This fragmentation undermines the potential to build a common front of education, conscientisation and struggle among farm workers. Ultimately, labour market policy interventions have not broken the circuit of the perverse integration and exclusion of farm workers and dwellers into the accumulation strategy of agrarian capital: farm workers survive on the margins of the 'white' countryside, while they are actually central to the very successful and globally integrated farms (Du Toit 2005). This is not to say that there are not many overt and covert contestations and negotiations between farm workers and farmers, but the nature of these struggles does not result in the mobilisation and organisation of farm workers.

Three primary obstacles impede the organisation and mobilisation of farm workers. First, and most salient, are political obstacles, in an environment in which control over privately owned land has traditionally involved extensive control by farmers over all aspects of life for those living on farms. Unlike workers in many other sectors, the farm is the locus not only of employment, but also of residence, both for the worker and, typically, for the family. Second, logistical and geographical factors combine to make this a particularly difficult sector in which to organise, as most parts of the country, with the exception of some intensive horticultural regions in the Western Cape and Mpumalanga, typically have a low concentration of workers. The population is dispersed and access to farms is difficult (and sometimes dangerous) for outsiders supporting worker organisation. Third, the restructuring of the rural labour force, and the haemorrhaging of permanent employment, means that, to the degree that workers have become organised, this is a revolving door – a person who is a farm worker today may not be tomorrow, and vice versa. Organising as workers, then, seems a limited strategy, yet unions are wedded to this model, although several more localised initiatives like Sikhula Sonke have sought to organise people as rural communities rather than as 'workers' per se.

The chiefly and professional strata

A further significant rural class is that of the bureaucratic and professional petty bourgeoisie largely created through the bantustan system. Perhaps the most important component of this 'rural bureaucratic petty bourgeoisie' is that of traditional leaders, which, from a history of resistance to conquest, was incorporated as a political and administrative extension of the colonial and apartheid states. From the layer of professionals, mainly civil servants and teachers, grew some of the opposition to 'homeland' policies, but, at the same time, many of these professionals and traditional leaders became dependent on the patronage dispensed by the bantustan regimes (Ntsebeza 2006).

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Partly because of this complex history of resistance and collusion, traditional leaders have, with some exceptions, failed to provide the lead in mobilisation around livelihood demands in the rural areas. Because of disputes over their powers and their failure to democratise, traditional leaders may be a largely untapped political resource for rural people. Instead, emboldened traditional leaders have increased their power and hegemony, and have positioned themselves as mediators between the people and the government on the question of control and use of land, as well as on the delivery of services. Even so, the ANC and SACP felt that it was 'not politically desirable to alienate traditional leaders such that they define the advancement of their interests in opposition to the democratic government' (SACP 1999). Areas of contestation between local citizens, traditional leaders and the state include their powers *vis-à-vis* democratic local government, their powers of land allocation and administration confirmed through the Communal Land Rights Act, and their governance and judicial powers in terms of the Traditional Courts Bill (currently being debated in 2008). This poses the fundamental question of how to reconcile the role of traditional leaders and the democratic empowerment of ordinary people. Yet, as the SACP has warned, 'to subject the future of the rural people to the whims of traditional leaders would postpone rural transformation for a long time to come' (SACP 1999).

Civil society at the periphery of land politics

The lack of strong national or provincial organisations to articulate and fight for the demands of the landless, small producers and farmers has created a political vacuum. It is a vacuum that has been filled by numerous NGOs, churches and political organisations that not only speak on behalf of the rural poor, but also have tended to assume leadership, mediate political choices and substitute for the lack of organised strength of the rural poor. Moyo (2005: 41) argues that NGOs, through funded projects, tend to 'co-opt rural grievances into welfarist projects'. Yet, over the past decade, the land NGO movement, still somewhat separate from broader political and civil society, has increasingly prioritised building organisations of the rural poor from the grassroots up, rather than speaking on their behalf – a practice that has been slow and complex, a learning process and also, at times, a source of tension among these organisations. This has helped to spawn a number of localised people's organisations – regional farm dweller committees and small farmer associations, among others.

In recent years, then, whether through NGO support or not, new forms of mobilisation have become evident and are starting to fill this vacuum. The formation of small farmer associations (including would-be farmers), farm worker committees and broader initiatives to unify around demands for land and livelihoods have highlighted a number of lessons: the importance of sustained community organisation at a local level; how landlessness strongly combines with more generalised underdevelopment in the former homeland areas and also the commercial farming areas where new informal settlements have been on the increase; the importance of building organic links between

rural dwellers covering different geographical areas; and how rural development can lay the basis for building a wider social struggle for land and agrarian reform.

In building alliances and linkages between urban movements and rural movements, the participation of NGOs, churches, trade unions and other actors of civil society is essential. The view that NGOs dominate is only relevant and applicable when people's mass-based organisations on the ground, and their leadership, are fragile and weak. NGOs will and should continue to play a supportive and even subordinate role to social movements of the poor; they can do this best as an integral part of these movements rather than as outside agents or leading from above. It will require common campaigns, building local leadership and supporting popular local organisations that are self-sustaining and independent. For now, however, while NGO formations are the repository of important understanding and expertise from their groundwork experience, at a national level they are politically marginal.

The ANC, the state and the left in the alliance

In thinking about the positioning and roles of the ANC-SACP-Cosatu alliance on land and agrarian reform, on the eve of transition, Bernstein (1992) argued that:

Political organisation and representation of oppressed groups in the countryside (beyond the local level) is almost non-existent. This has potentially serious effects for perceptions and theorisation of land and agrarian reform by the national democratic movement, which in turn affect the formulation and practise of any agrarian strategy. In fact, at present there is no political strategy on the agrarian question.

Despite the ANC's strong rural roots and support, it remains essentially an urbanised and modern political movement. For many decades of its existence, the focus of ANC mobilisation has been the urbanised working class. Despite the rural roots of some of its key leaders, only a few of them, like Govan Mbeki and Alpheus Malivha, have focused any attention on rural struggles. This urban bias continues and is loudly echoed in government policies. Nattrass and Seekings (2001) also suggest that the claims of the urban insiders shape government policy at the expense of socially and politically invisible rural outsiders. This critique applies equally to the traditionally working class organisations in alliance with the ANC – the SACP and Cosatu. Consequently, the alliance entered the transition without an agrarian programme beyond the ambit of land reform.

The left in the alliance has not done much to build effective mobilisation and organisation around land and agrarian struggles. From about 1999, the SACP and COSATU increasingly became concerned with the failures of the land reform programme as part of their wider struggles against the neo-liberal GEAR macroeconomic policy. Since then, they have articulated sporadic demands and campaigns for thoroughgoing land and agrarian reform. At the same time, some of the rural structures of these organisations could not avoid having to respond to struggles of farm workers and the rural poor. Initially, their focus was merely on the need to accelerate land reform, while later on this grew into a more systematic critique of the 'willing-buyer, willing-seller' principle and the systemic hostility to smallholder and co-operative production. By the time the SACP launched its impressive 2004 Red October Campaign calling for 'Land! Food! Jobs!', both it and COSATU had developed their own perspectives on agrarian reform as the necessary context for land reform. This merged with the increase in public discourse about sustainable livelihoods, and a conscious attempt was made to link agrarian reform to wider and sustainable rural development.

The SACP Red October Campaign put direct pressure on agrarian capital and ruffled feathers in the government. COSATU linked this with industrial policy debates and argued for sectoral strategies

Despite the ANC's strong rural roots and support, it remains essentially an urbanised and modern political movement

Land and agrarian reform were part of these intra-alliance policy debates and struggles

to create jobs upstream and downstream of the agriculture value chain. COSATU provided policy resources to enrich the contribution of the alliance left on land and agrarian reform. Many in civil society were not happy with the SACP focus on land, believing that it was a mere sop to crowd out critical voices; nonetheless, it helped to galvanise mobilisation towards the 2005 Land Summit, where its presence was strongly felt, despite its weak organisation in rural areas.

By the time of the Land Summit, both the SACP and COSATU were beginning to marshal significant resources towards the 'battle for the soul of the ANC' (Gumede 2005). Land and agrarian reform were part of these intra-alliance policy debates and struggles. The contents of the Polokwane resolution on land reform can be attributed partly to the influence of the alliance left; however, what has been lost is attention to the building of rural social forces. Post-Polokwane, COSATU has sought to use alliance platforms such as the May 2008 Alliance Summit to call for 'urgent implementation of the Land Summit resolutions' (COSATU 2008). COSATU mobilisation around food prices has been another platform for public agitation for land and agrarian reform, with demands directed at the government to take action to stem the food price crisis. However, both the SACP and COSATU still pay insufficient attention to directing pressure on agrarian capital and building rural mobilisation.

At the same time, FAWU has made important contributions to the land and agrarian reform debates, and the food price crisis. However, it is quite weak in its organisation of farm workers and its analysis of the agrarian question, particularly its linkages with globalised capitalism. For example, its analysis of the food price crisis limits its focus to the impact the food price crisis has on workers (see Masemola & Watkins 2008), and limits its alternative proposals to ameliorating the impact of the crisis without a critique of the structure of large-scale commercial agriculture. It is, therefore, unclear whether these allies of the ANC have the capacity and orientation to envisage structural change and to undertake sustained rural mobilisation, which would be required to advance the position adopted at the ANC's Polokwane conference, to which we now turn.

Polokwane and beyond

The ANC's National Conference in December 2007 was an event of such significance that its location – Polokwane in Limpopo province – has now become synonymous with a political era. We have now entered the 'post-Polokwane' era, one in which the possibility of future policy change must be tempered by the reality of very substantial continuity. At the very least, though, there are two political currents running through much economic thinking within the ruling alliance, and that being pursued by the next-administration-in-waiting is on the ascendancy.

The resolution: what it says

The resolution... introduced an economic rationale for a process of land reform, namely agrarian change

Polokwane marked a departure in the ANC's thinking about rural development, which goes well beyond existing programmes that essentially co-ordinate separate departmental efforts. The resolution on 'Land Reform, Rural Development and Agrarian Change' introduced an economic rationale for a process of land reform, namely agrarian change. Combining these three terms in the title, in itself, signalled that land reform would, or should, be located within a much wider programme of restructuring – something that has been missing up to now. Unlike previous declarations, it conceded that the pace of redistributing land is not the only or even the primary challenge. While reform has been too slow, it recognises that the *type* of reform has been limited and inappropriate:

Current approaches to land reform are not achieving the scale or outcomes required for the realisation of a better life for rural South Africans...Land reform has not been located within a broader strategy of rural development or a commitment to supporting smallholder farming on a scale that is able to improve rural livelihoods. As a result, changes in land ownership have not realised their full potential to transform social relations, combat rural poverty and promote rural development. (ANC 2007: 2)

For the first time in ANC statements on the matter, the resolution started to give content to the notion of 'agrarian reform'. It resolved to embark on a multifaceted process that would include 'agrarian change with a view to supporting subsistence food production, expanding the role and productivity of modern smallholder farming and maintaining a vibrant and competitive agricultural sector' and to revisit national agricultural policies, particularly tariffs, subsidies and marketing institutions (ANC 2007: 5–6). It would support:

the growth of rural market institutions including through the provision of infrastructure and by helping rural communities and small farmers to build organisations which help them to access markets, build links with formal sector value chains and coordinate their activities to realise economies of scale. Such organisations may include producer co-operatives, smallholder associations, input supply co-ops, marketing co-ops and/or state regulated institutions designed to support and promote market access and collective action amongst small rural producers. Special attention will be given to the empowerment of women in co-operatives. (ANC 2007: 6)

The starting point of the resolution is the recognition that the foundational challenge is not the distribution of land, but the structure of the rural economy, and that redistribution of land rights is a means to an end. It envisages that to address this will require a new, invigorated and strategic role for the state: 'The developmental state has a central role to play in leading and sustaining rural development' (ANC 2007: 4). This would require the state to make strategic choices about how to shape markets in favour of smallholder farmers and to establish new industries, particularly agro-industries, to support the rural non-farm economy. For instance, it moots the possibility of reintroducing certain subsidies on inputs into production, which, if enacted, would be a dramatic reversal of the agricultural policy thrust of the past two decades.

redistribution of
land rights is a
means to an end

One implication of this shifting vision is the need for more state resources and capacity, and new institutional arrangements, to enable the state to take on a stronger lead role. The resolution proposes, inter alia, the following elements of reform:

- a. *Create an over-arching authority with the resources and authority to drive and coordinate an integrated programme of rural development, land reform and agrarian change.*
- b. *Implement the Freedom Charter's call to help those working the land with implements, seed, tractors, infrastructure for irrigation and other forms of material support.*
- c. *Implement large-scale programmes to establish new smallholders and improve the productivity of existing small-scale and subsistence farmers, and to integrate smallholders into formal value chains and link them with markets.*
- d. *Build dedicated state and private institutions that are accountable to their users for the effective and directed support to land reform beneficiaries in general and smallholder agriculture and family farms in particular, including through financial support, research and extension, the provision of tools and equipment and the facilitation of market access and cooperation.*

- e. *Review the mandate, capacity and operations of institutions such as the Land Bank in order to ensure that the state is able to provide directed credit and capital for investment in support of a transformed agricultural sector and rural economy.*
- f. *Improve the ability of government to take the lead in innovation, research and development and extension services appropriate to the development of a smallholder farming sector. (ANC 2007:5)*

the focus of the developmental state will be on support for the establishment and growth of a smallholder sector

This signals a reversal of existing agricultural policy in two major respects. First, it proposes an enlarged role for the state in supporting agriculture both directly through transfers and provision of goods and indirectly through investment in public institutions, thereby rolling back to a degree the rapid deregulation and the dismantling of public support to the sector that the ANC signed up to in the early 1990s on the advice of the World Bank among others. Second, it clarifies unequivocally that while the aim is to establish more of a mixed farming sector, the focus of the developmental state will be on support for the establishment and growth of a smallholder sector, including both market-orientated small-scale production and food production primarily for subsistence purposes.

Contradiction and continuity

Despite these markedly progressive elements, the resolution contains and even deepens some of the key contradictions that have underpinned land and agricultural policies over the past decade and more. These contradictions relate to the vision for the future of the sector, the class character of the state's programmes, and the relationship between a smallholder farming class and the established commercial farming and agribusiness industries. While arguing for more direct state intervention in support of the 'second economy', the resolution ultimately remains uncritical of the ways in which the mainstream of commercial farming and agribusiness reproduce rural poverty and narrow patterns of accumulation.

In sum, then, the future growth path as set out in the resolution is bifurcated. On the one hand, it envisages a flourishing smallholder class of producers well connected to local agro-industry; to enable this, the main thrust of the resolution breaks with the 'willing-buyer, willing-seller' approach and underlines the role of the state and social mobilisation in driving land reform. On the other hand, the resolution calls for the promotion of a capitalist black commercial farming class and also sustains the export orientation of present commercial agriculture. These different interests (of the landless, emerging black capitalist farmers and agrarian capital) are present, uneasily, alongside one another.

As well as being contradictory, the resolution is silent on a number of issues. Regarding the question of the class character of land and agrarian reforms, the resolution focuses on the role of the state in restructuring, but it does not indicate *who* is to be prioritised in this process and, therefore, how other social forces might relate to this project. It does not attach special priority to the poor, nor to those who are already living on and deriving at least part of their livelihoods from the land, notably farm dwellers and land users resident in the former bantustans. It also elides the contentious topic of the chieftaincy and the democratisation of traditional authority. It does not recognise that the private sector is driving its own version of land reform, which targets better-resourced black emerging farmers with the aim of de-racialising the commercial sector; in this context, it does not explore the distinctive role of the state, or a possible division of labour between the state and the private sector. It does recognise, however, that 'black economic empowerment and the de-racialisation of agricultural ownership is a necessary but insufficient condition for the realisation of our transformation goals in rural South Africa' (ANC 2007: 4).

The resolution does recognise that attention must be given to the substantial population of poor black people living on white-owned farmland as wage workers, but does not indicate that they may have independent and long-standing relationships with the land, and may have no other home. It addresses the dire situation in which farm workers and dwellers live and work, and calls for support for them to be organised, but stops short of acknowledging that existing approaches to securing the land rights of farm dwellers have been wholly inadequate and that evictions undermine the gains of land reform. It does not indicate the direction of future policy on farm dwellers, beyond regulating the movement of people off farms: for instance, it does not affirm their rights to remain where they are; it does not envisage that they might expand their access to arable and grazing land for their own use *in situ* (the original vision of tenure reform); it does not consider the need for opportunities for people to combine smallholder production with continued employment in commercial enterprises. Ultimately, it does not adhere to the Freedom Charter's declaration: 'The Land Shall be Shared Among Those Who Work It!' (which could suggest that those already living and working on commercial farms might be a priority category).

Instead of a distinctive argument about transformation on commercial farms, the resolution merely (and correctly) notes a generalised problem of weak political voice from the rural areas and argues that the state's programme must provide spaces to support rural people to organise, to articulate their interests and needs (which are not differentiated in the resolution itself) and to define the direction of development. This is equally applicable to 'the poor' in general, who are envisaged as central actors in the process (though how this is to come about remains somewhat unclear):

The participation of the poor in the design, implementation and monitoring of rural development programmes is a key objective of the developmental state... Social movements and land-owners all have a role to play in the realisation of our vision. The ANC and its alliance partners too have a critical role in mobilising and organising rural communities behind the objectives of the NDR [National Democratic Revolution] in general, and the goals of rural development in particular. (ANC 2007: 4)

The resolution, then, fudges the real political hot potato – what land reform, rural development and agrarian change will mean for the established commercial farming sector and the class relations it has produced. It remains equivocal on whether (or to what degree) the aim is to transform or to retain the structure of commercial farming. Despite the commitment to promoting a smallholder farming sector, the resolution elides the obvious problems of doing so in the current liberalised economic policy environment. It appears to presume, instead, that agriculture's growth path will continue to be export-led and that, legitimated through the growth of a black capitalist farming class and a growing smallholder class, commercial agriculture will continue to predominate.

The post-Polokwane political terrain

So, has Polokwane created new political conditions favourable for advancing land and agrarian reform? The foregoing analysis shows political conditions that are still not open to thoroughgoing



Woman worker on restituted farm under strategic partnership, Limpopo, September 2008. Photo by Ruth Hall.

reform, either in the provisions of policy or in the kind of politics supported by the ruling alliance. In large measure, the anti-Mbeki challenge has been about grievance and conspiracy politics, demands for inclusion of an elite group in decision-making, hype, sensation and the now infamous 'coalition of the wounded'. All this can potentially lead to the systemic demobilisation of progressive and popular forces, the forsaking of democratic values and the undermining of democratic impulses in broader society. In this scheme, politics becomes a kind of theatre in which a few become vocal players on the stage, but the majority of the people are reduced to disempowered spectators. In such a plot, we see the death of progressive democratic politics. Such politics have a debilitating effect on popular forces struggling for the deepening of democracy.

Without doubt, however, the succession battle has opened up some space that could lead to the creation of conditions for a more democratic ANC and more progressive state policies. Still, even the 'emotive forces' of Polokwane recognise that the 'post-Polokwane' reality has not challenged the structural dimensions of power in our society. Less clear is whether it has opened the way to question, critique, challenge and replace the liberal-democratic framework with a more empowering script of participatory and direct democracy. For now, the play seems set to continue on a preset stage. In any case, there are serious questions about the strategic and tactical capacity of the ANC's alliance partners on the left (the SACP and COSATU) to optimise this policy space.

A critical factor is whether the new ANC executive and the possible Zuma-led government will have the required policy vision, capacity and ability to take forward the Polokwane resolution; this has not been demonstrated. The situation leaves the possibility for policy capture by elite interests. In fact, from October 2007, Zuma's seduction of investors, credit rating agencies, business houses and even emerging domestic elites has affirmed the continuities and certainties of the so-called 1996 class project. Clearly, Polokwane has not created the necessary political conditions for Zuma to act very differently to his predecessor, nor does he show the will to do so. Even if it did, and he did, it is another matter whether the ANC has yet developed the political will to lead a concerted challenge to vested interests and transform society by untangling the foundations of inequality, underdevelopment and poverty. On the contrary, agrarian and other fractions of South African capital are applying pressure across the board to ensure policy continuity. If this continues alongside growing inequality, poverty and unemployment, a compromise with capital can be combined easily with ameliorative welfare and dangerous populism.

There is an alternative path, though: a struggle aimed at transforming the balance of forces, transforming ownership patterns, and thoroughgoing structural transformation of our economy. This must rest on taking 'the power of the state away from capital' (Lebowitz 2006). But is an alternative path possible? In addition to the multiple (food, energy, ecological) global capitalist crises, important space for domestic autonomy has been created. The South African state is in control of massive resources that provide important economic leverage at some distance from capital. These conditions are more favourable than the triumphalist neo-liberal years of the early 1990s. Considered in this changing global context, the post-Polokwane spring is pregnant with strategic potential.

Critical political conditions

In view of the above discussion, we suggest three critical political conditions required for thoroughgoing land and agrarian reform and wider transformation of our society:

- *Mobilisation of progressive social forces*: this remains the most important challenge and will require imaginative work to root rural people's organisations in very specific local contexts, while

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building bridges between them in order to create common platforms. The 'single issue' politics of 'land reform' is unlikely to provide the basis for broad-based movements. Rural people's movements are beginning to show the way to sustained and more effective rural mobilisation, linking livelihood demands – for food, security and dignity – to questions of land rights, agrarian change, production and markets. Increased political work and social mobilisation would need to be directed both at agrarian capital and at the state.

- *Progressive political leadership*: for too long rural people's groups have engaged with the state as if it were monolithic; however, there are clearly progressive individuals and institutions with whom engagement could be productive. Given the shifts in the ANC following Polokwane, and the ambiguous embrace of a stronger social justice agenda, there may be further spaces to be explored. It is very likely that the ascendant leadership of the ANC will be tested in terms of how far it goes with progressive policies in the alliance, and the state, that would limit paths of accumulation for agrarian capital, and there are few agrarian reformers within the state and the ANC who might champion such a cause. Even so, the ability of rural people's organisations and civil society structures to work constructively *with the state*, while also defending their autonomy, is crucial.
- *Building strategic alliances*: the third condition for progressive change in land and agrarian reform is the forging of strategic alliances around (elements of) a common alternative vision of development. Rural people's movements are very unlikely, by themselves, to pose a political challenge either to agrarian capital or to the ruling party; it is only in alliance with other social forces (the rural petit bourgeoisie, the urban working class and the urban unemployed) that such a movement can acquire leverage over state programmes. Given the different class interests and geographical locations, such alliances should be expected to be wracked with complications, not least because the ANC's alliance partners could be important allies. A crucial factor will be their ability to work together, and independently, to challenge agrarian capital while exerting pressure on, and working with, the state.

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A major challenge facing the landless is to develop strategies and tactics to contest the social and economic power, influence and interests of agrarian capital. Clearly, this would have to include a combination of an anti-capital popular struggle, as well as some level of social dialogue. For the poor to exert leverage would require a combination of different tactics to engage with the state and the alliance, while putting pressure on agrarian capital and locking it into concessions. It may be possible that agrarian capital can be pressurised to compromise in return for improved agricultural support and trade protection.

To create conditions for engagement in broad social dialogue, with domestic agribusiness in particular, there is a need for both political leadership and progressive social forces to build a shared vision for an alternative path of development and accumulation that can resolve the social crises of rural livelihoods, as well as the related crises of food prices, energy prices (and shortages) and environmental depletion. While *elements* of such a vision have become apparent, from the activities of emerging social movements and from the ANC's resolution, these remain somewhat inchoate. There have been few spaces for frank engagement between social movements and political leadership around what this vision, and its realisation, would entail in terms of policy change, institutions and resources. Whether the ANC's alliance partners use their growing leverage within the ruling party to open up such spaces for others may be a crucial determinant of whether a shared vision can be developed.

Conclusion

Political rhetoric has overstated the degree to which the position of the state has changed regarding land and agrarian reform

Political rhetoric has overstated the degree to which the position of the state has changed regarding land and agrarian reform. It is important not to lose sight of *policy continuity*, and the degree to which, beyond the changing terminology, policy proposals and personalities involved, the conditions that inform state policy remain unchanged. It remains to be seen whether a new administration in 2009, and the (expected) greater influence of the ANC's alliance partners will cement these trends, and so pave the way for more progressive stances on land reform and the agricultural sector. However, one should not mistake this expanded space as signalling a stronger commitment to land reform per se; rather, it remains a *by-product* of wider political shifts. Whether or not this translates into substantially changed policy and practice, giving some content to the somewhat vacuous notions of 'agrarian reform' and even 'agrarian revolution' that now pepper political discourse, will depend on whether rural social movements and their allies are able to realign themselves.

The linkages between movements of the rural poor, urban movements and organised labour around common campaigns are critical. The leadership that is emerging in the new rural movements, popular organisations and farmer groups has been shaped by the struggles for access to land and livelihoods of the past decade, and is distrustful of and distant from mainstream politics. This is a new leadership shaped by the challenges of globalisation and the transition in South Africa. Like the Treatment Action Campaign, as post-transition social movements they will have to build a group of vulnerable people into a social force with weight and voice. Since the courts could be another platform for the land struggle, they will need to strategically combine sustained mass mobilisation with an advanced litigation strategy.

Although the current conjuncture signals expanded space to push for progressive new departures in land reform and agrarian change, political conditions indicate that this space should not be overestimated. Two basic conditions for radical change are not present: the ability of the rural poor and landless to create sufficient political uncertainty for elites, and the interests of elites, to bring about major restructuring from above. What then is feasible within the existing political terrain? While the language of key social forces is about 'restructuring', what we can expect for now is more modest: increased resources for land reform and a gradual expansion of support to smallholder agriculture.

Key steps from the government's side, which would suggest a serious shift in practice, are:

- policy mechanisms to ring-fence resources for the poor, or clear articulation about how resources will be rationed between competing people and needs in favour of those without their own capital to invest;
- willingness to subdivide farm holdings and to support changed, low-input land uses and production technologies;
- substantial investment in the institutions responsible, through increased current (operating) budget allocations to the DLA and DoA, and the creation of a single authority for rural development and land and agrarian reform, as proposed in the ANC's resolution;
- revision of spatial development policy to make possible the creation of new settlement patterns in support of smallholder production; and
- reintroduction of production (i.e. input) subsidies and public support for input, processing and marketing co-operatives.

In conclusion, there are various contradictions that we are seeing. These suggest that, in key political spaces, the stakes are higher than in the past. Land reform matters. Agricultural production by, and food for, the poor matters. Some of the increased importance of land and agriculture arises from the failure of the macroeconomic policies of the GEAR era, and the recognition of the need for a 'developmental state' to direct state investment and promotion of more accessible markets in the 'second economy'. For this reason, the (apparent) newfound emphasis on fast-tracking proactive land reform, and embarking on agrarian reform (or 'revolution') is largely the by-product of this higher-level shift. While still limited, there is more political space than at any time since the mid-1990s for rural people to mobilise in favour of progressive change. However, this space is not being well used. There are few instances where such a social movement is pushing visibly and vocally for changes on the ground. For now, with the exception of the Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal, the rural areas have remained a secure ANC vote-bank and, ironically, this is most clearly the case in the poorest rural provinces of Limpopo and the Eastern Cape. When mobilisation starts to challenge electoral politics, a new configuration of social forces may emerge.

there is more political space than at any time since the mid-1990s for rural people to mobilise in favour of progressive change

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